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Former CIA chief supports arms freeze

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WASHINGTON — Former CIA Director William Colby yesterday endorsed the idea of a weapons freeze between the United States and the Soviet Union, saying it would pose no significant danger of undetected Soviet cheating.

In fact, he said, any nuclear arms accord with Moscow would make it "easier rather than harder" to keep tabs on what the Soviets are doing by empowering the United States to demand to know the nature of any suspicious Soviet arms behavior.

And if the Soviets cheated, they always would have to worry that so many officials would know of it that any one of them, repelled by the threat to world peace, might tell the West, Colby said.

The former intelligence officer, who served during the Nixon and Ford administrations, discussed the prospects of a verification freeze during a breakfast meeting here with reporters.

He said the Soviets could surreptitiously violate an agreement to freeze the production, deployment or testing of new nuclear weapons for a while, but not long enough to endanger U.S. security significantly.

"It is conceivable they can go into one of those salt mines and produce something and hammer it out all very quietly and secretly and nobody will be able to see it or know about it," he said.

"But the question has to be asked, can they do that in a way that has any strategic significance? And there I think the answer is basically no. In other words, successful violations will almost surely be marginal in their real effect."

His position on verification differs from that of the Reagan administration. In April, a State Department policy statement said:

"A freeze on all testing, production and deployment of nuclear weapons would include important elements that cannot be verified. The practical result is that the United States would live up to a freeze in all its aspects, while there would be considerable doubt that the Soviets would also live up to it. We simply cannot afford to base our national security on trust of the Soviets."

President Reagan opposes a freeze, but the idea has support in Congress and was endorsed by the Democrats last week at their party conference in Philadelphia. Both the House and Senate are expected to vote this summer on resolutions asking Reagan to propose a freeze to the Soviets as a first step toward disarmament.

Opponents have raised the question of verifying Soviet compliance as one objection to a freeze. But Colby argued that a freeze treaty would allow the United States to demand to look into any suspicious activities detected by intelligence means. Without a treaty, he said, the Soviets can simply say, "That's none of your business."

Colby said normal CIA intelligence checks on Soviet compliance would come into play. But in addition, he said, the Soviets would have to consider whether someone knowledgeable about the cheating would reveal it.

Colby said U.S. security cannot depend on such an off-chance episode. But when that possibility is placed alongside other intelligence-gathering means, he said, it is safe to conclude that U.S. security would not be endangered by a freeze agreement or any other disarmament accord.

He said that either a freeze or an arms limitation agreement "is adequately verifiable for the safety of the country and the chance of violation is minimal."



William Colby
Says agreements can be verified